

An observation of a Southern Water Skink *Eulamprus tympanum* giving birth

The Southern Water Skink *Eulamprus tympanum* is a common and widespread reptile throughout much of southern and central Victoria (Atlas of Victorian Wildlife Database). The species reproduces by giving birth to live young and usually inhabits moist or waterside habitats (Wilson and Swan, 2003). It is, however, also found in drier areas, provided suitable habitat such as fallen logs or rocks are present.

At one such site in Blue Gum forest in the Otway Ranges, about 2.5 kilometres south-west of Lorne, a dry, steep slope is covered in numerous fallen logs of various sizes. I regularly visit this location for birdwatching and to observe reptiles, especially the arboreal Spencer's Skink *Pseudemoia spenceri* and the Southern Water Skink. One particularly large log has many cracks and exfoliating pieces of timber, making ideal habitat for these species of lizards.

On 12 January 2006, during one such visit, an adult Southern Water Skink emerged from a crack in this large log at about 11.15 am daylight saving time. The skink proceeded to move slowly over the log, searching for prey amongst the cracks, but soon partly disappeared between sections of timber, so I momentarily turned my attention to a Spencer's Skink that was climbing a nearby daisy bush.

After a few minutes I returned my gaze to the large log and found that the Southern Water Skink had moved out into an open sunny position, but appeared to be convulsing and twisting its body with its mouth partly open. By this time I was very close to the skink, but it completely ignored my presence.

Initially I thought the skink may have been choking on some item of prey, but then I noticed something wriggling under the base of its tail. Looking closely I could see what looked like a small tail, when suddenly a tiny, wet juvenile skink appeared from underneath the adult between the base of the tail and one of the hind legs. The juvenile skink, which had been born tail-first, remained motionless for a few seconds and then suddenly disappeared down a crack in the log. Several seconds later the adult also disappeared down a different crack.

During the birth the female remained in an upright position on the log. The only evidence that the birth had taken place was a yellowish, slimy patch on the log, which soon dried up in the warm sun. I estimated the adult to have an overall length of about 180-200 mm and the juvenile's overall length to be about 35-40 mm. The temperature at the site was approximately 20-22 degrees Celsius.

References:

- Atlas of Victorian Wildlife Database, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria.
Wilson S and Swan G (2003) *A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia*. (Reed New Holland: Sydney)

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